

NEWS RELEASE

717 General Booth Blvd. Virginia Beach, VA 23451



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Mackenzie Di Nardo | MDiNardo@VirginiaAquarium.com

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Threatened Crocodile Species Hatches at Virginia Aquarium

(Virginia Beach, VA) – Two *Tomistoma* hatched at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center on September 1, 2022. In May, 16-year-old Sommer laid a clutch of 19 eggs. Two babies hatched after being closely monitored by the Aquarium’s husbandry team during a 113-day incubation period. This is the first successful *Tomistoma* birth at the Aquarium, following previous nests laid by Sommer in 2019 and 2020.

“This hatching event is significant for not only the Virginia Aquarium, but also for broader *Tomistoma* conservation in North America,” says Colin Walker, Assistant Curator of Fishes, Herpetology, and Invertebrates at the Virginia Aquarium. “Ralf and Sommer were the first legal *Tomistoma* imports from a home-range country in nearly 50 years, and their offspring will contribute greatly to the long-term genetic diversity of this crocodylian species.”

Native to Malaysia and Indonesia, *Tomistoma* are a freshwater crocodylian species at risk of extinction. Therefore, this reproduction marks a commemorative milestone for the Virginia Aquarium and the *Tomistoma* Species Survival Plan (SSP), an Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) conservation program that manages breeding, research, and field projects with the goal to maintain a healthy and self-sustaining population.

The hatchlings are approximately 12 inches long and will likely double in size within the first year. They will remain behind the scenes at the Virginia Aquarium for about 12 months while their health is closely monitored. Aquarium staff are coordinating with *Tomistoma* SSP partners to locate qualified caretakers.

Born in Malaysia, Ralf (male) and Sommer were acquired by the Virginia Aquarium in October 2015. At the time, they were the first legally imported *Tomistoma* in the U.S. since 1973. *Tomistoma* are one of the least studied of the 24 different types of crocodylians found around the world, due to their remote and inaccessible habitat, but some estimates show only 2,500 remaining in the wild. *Tomistoma* are listed as vulnerable on the International Union of Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and listed as endangered according to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Population threats include habitat destruction, drowning in fishing nets, and overfishing of food resources.

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center has an extensive history with field and conservation research on these animals. The Aquarium is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) as well as a participating member of the AZA Crocodylian Taxonomic Advisory Group.

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. The Aquarium is also a member of World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The Virginia Aquarium’s mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices. It is located at 717 General Booth Boulevard, just south of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach.

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium’s exhibits,

including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission by making a [tax-deductible donation](#) to support our programming.

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